



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Thursday, October 7, 2010
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New Federal \$\$ Will Help UDOH Address Infant Mortality

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Utah’s Black/African American and Pacific Islander babies suffer the highest rates of infant mortality in the state and a new U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant will help the Utah Department of Health, (UDOH) Center for Multicultural Health (CMH) understand why.

Pacific Islander infants under 12 months of age had nearly twice the death rate (8.8 deaths/1,000 births) of infants statewide (4.5 deaths/1,000 births). The rate for Black/African American infants was 8.4 deaths/1,000 births. Black/African American infants also had the highest rates of low birth weight (11.4%) and preterm birth (13.0%) of all Utah infants. The state rates were 6.8% and 9.7%, respectively.

“In our Black and Pacific Islander populations, we are 20 years behind the rest of the state at preventing infant death ,” said CMH Program Manager Owen Quiñonez. The statewide infant mortality rate hasn’t been over 8 deaths/1,000 births since the 1980s.

The 3-year, \$130,000 grant requires that CMH focus on evidence-based interventions addressing no more than three health disparities. In addition to health concerns surrounding births, CMH will also use the funds for research into issues of obesity and health care access among Utah minority groups, two other disparities that turned up amid a comprehensive study of minority health in Utah.

Regarding obesity, while the majority (59.0%) of all Utah adults are overweight, the Black/African American rate is 72.4%, Pacific Islander, 78.4%, and Hispanic, 67.3%.

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CMH is now seeking expert leaders from public health, health care and community-based organizations to participate on Advisory Boards that will plan and supervise interventions and oversee the selection of community outreach subcontractors.

“Community-based leadership has been crucial to our success so far in reducing health disparities,” said Quiñonez. “We hope that many of the advocates we have worked with over the past five years will be interested in serving on our new Advisory Boards. We are also seeking new leaders who are experts in the fields of reproductive health, obesity prevention and health care access.”

Over the past decade, health care access has declined among Utah minorities. Hispanics had the highest uninsured rate in the state at 35.7%, up from 25.8% in 2001. Statewide, 11.1% of Utahns were uninsured. Only 8.8% of Pacific Islanders lacked health insurance in 2001, but 23.0% were uninsured in the recent analysis. Being unable to access needed care was reported by 21.3% of Hispanics and 21.9% of Blacks/African Americans in Utah, in contrast to 15.9% of all Utahns. All Utah racial and ethnic minority groups had lower rates of receiving early prenatal care than statewide. The state rate was 79.1%; Asians, 75.2%, Blacks/African Americans, 61.2%, Pacific Islanders, 48.1% and Hispanics, 63.4%.

For more information, please contact April Young Bennett at (801) 703-0127. To read more on ethnic health disparities in Utah, see <http://health.utah.gov/cmh/data/movingforward.pdf>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.